

**COWLITZ COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE**  
**RESPONDING TO PETITION FOR DIVORCE – NO ATTORNEYS**

**Procedural Checklist**

Prepared by the Cowlitz County Clerk's Office

This checklist is **not** a substitute for legal advice. Before responding to any legal action, it is always wise to consult an attorney regarding your rights and responsibilities. Many attorneys offer low-cost consultations. Only an attorney can give legal advice.

**You may purchase forms for this action from the Office of the Cowlitz County Clerk or you can download them from the Washington Court's website at [www.courts.wa.gov/forms](http://www.courts.wa.gov/forms). Our fees must be paid by cash, money order or cashier's check. We do not accept personal checks.**

To respond to a Petition for Divorce (Dissolution), you may do so in several different ways. Based on where/how you were served will determine your response time.

Service Method	Timeframe
Personal service in the State of Washington	20 days to respond
Personal service outside the State of Washington	60 days to respond
Service by mail	90 days to respond

If you **agree** to all of the Petition and wish to join the action, file the following:

Form Number	Form Name	Last Revised
FL All Family 119	Agreement to Join Petition (Joinder)	5/2016

If you **disagree** with some or all of the Petition and wish to contest the action, file the following:

Form Number	Form Name	Last Revised
FL Divorce 211	Response to Petition about a Marriage	10/2023

If the case involves shared minor children and you disagree with the parenting plan they have proposed, you may file your own Proposed Parenting Plan by filing the following:

Form Number	Form Name	Last Revised
FL All Family 140	Parenting Plan (Proposed)	6/2024

**IMPORTANT NOTICE**

If you do not respond within the time listed above, the Court may find you in default. This means that the Court can proceed without you and a court order affecting your rights may be entered.

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Once you have completed your paperwork, you must file the original(s) with the Superior Court Clerk's Office. After your Response or Joinder is received by the Clerk, you will be provided with a Family Law Handbook that addresses the legal implications of marriage and divorce.

You must arrange to have the other party served with a copy of what you have filed with the Clerk. Someone 18 years or older and not involved with this action should be the one to serve. You may also contact law enforcement or a process server for a fee.

Once the other party has been served, you must file a Proof of Service form so that the Court knows they have been served.

Form Number	Form Name	Last Revised
FL All Family 101	Proof of Personal Service	6/2020

## What Happens Next?

### Agreed Matters:

- Your case can be finalized if 90 days have passed from the date the Summons and Petition was filed or the date the Joinder was filed.
- If you signed the Joinder, you must sign the final orders.
- Agreed final orders may be sent back ex parte for a judge's signature.
- In matters involving children, **Local Court Rule 92** requires that before the matter can be set for the uncontested final court hearing, your final pleadings must be reviewed by the Courthouse Facilitator or an attorney.

### Contested Matters:

- For contested matters involving children, your case must go to Mandatory Mediation per **Local Court Rule 93**. Your case will be transferred to a court approved mediation center where they will attempt to assist the parties in reaching a resolution. The Respondent must file a financial declaration to help the Court determine costs associated with Mediation. You must file:

Form Number	Form Name	Last Revised
FL All Family 131	Financial Declaration of (name): _____	9/2016

- If Mediation is unsuccessful, or for contested matters not involving children, a Court Commissioner or Judge may need to decide the contested issues. The next step to resolving contested issues is a Mandatory Settlement Conference (MSC). A Court Commissioner will attempt to help the parties reach an agreement without a trial.
- If the MSC is unsuccessful in resolving the contested issues, you may need to file a **Notice to Set Trial or Settlement Conference** to set a trial date. These notices can be found on the Clerk's Office website at: [www.co.cowlitz.wa.us/clerk](http://www.co.cowlitz.wa.us/clerk).

**File all documents with: COWLITZ COUNTY CLERKS OFFICE  
312 SW FIRST AVE, ROOM 233  
KELSO, WA 98626**